

EXAMINING LIMITATIONS IN COUNTERING CHINA'S ASCENDENCY: NAVIGATING CHALLENGES IN AUKUS WITHIN INDO-PACIFIC

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ABSTRACT

In the evolving Indo-Pacific geopolitical landscape, the AUKUS alliance, comprising the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, has emerged as a response to counter China's expanding influence. However, this research using qualitative method critically examines the potential limitations hindering AUKUS from effectively countering China's ascendancy using power transition theory. Despite its promise, AUKUS faces intricate challenges that may impact its role as a strong counterforce to China, necessitating an exploration of its complexities. This paper delves into the historical context of China's rise, its economic growth, military modernization, and geopolitical strategies that challenge U.S. ambitions. A detailed analysis of AUKUS components, diplomatic implications, and regional dynamics reveals potential shortcomings. The research underscores China's multidimensional response, leveraging economic aid and technological prowess. Moreover, it discusses AUKUS weaknesses, such as economic leverage disparities, technological sharing approaches, and domestic challenges within its member states. Drawing lessons from historical failures to contain rising powers, the paper explores alternative strategies, emphasizing the need for nuanced engagement and tailoring approaches to diverse regional cultures. As AUKUS confronts these challenges, this research provides insights into navigating the complex geopolitical landscape and shaping future strategies to counterbalance China's influence.

INTRODUCTION

The global playing political field is undergoing a significant shift with the ascent of China as a formidable economic, technological, and military power. From its founding as a communist nation in 1949 to its status as the world's second-largest economy, China's route has been marked by remarkable transformations and strategic initiatives. However, this rise has not been without its challenges and implications for the international community.

China's journey from isolation to economic powerhouse has significant milestones, including the implementation of economic reforms, military modernization efforts, and ambitious geopolitical projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). These developments have just not only pushed China onto the world stage but have also posed challenges to established powers, particularly the United States and its allies.

The United States has sought to counterbalance its rise through alliances and containment strategies. Initiatives like the Australia United Kingdom United States (AUKUS) alliance highlights the intensifying competition for dominance in the Indo-Pacific region in response to China's expanding influence. However, the effectiveness of such isolationist strategies remains uncertain in the face of China's economic leverage, technological prowess, and diplomatic manoeuvres.

It becomes evident to re-examine traditional approaches to managing geopolitical rivalries as tensions and rivalries escalate. The dynamics of power transitions and historical precedents offer valuable insights into the complexities of navigating China's rise. Moreover, the evolving global order demands a refined understanding of the challenges and opportunities presented by China's rise.

AUKUS is likely to encounter formidable challenges in its quest to effectively counter China's influence in the Indo-Pacific despite its initial objectives and notable developments. This argument rests on an in-depth examination of the alliance's components, diplomatic implications; this research seeks to shed light on the complexities that may hinder AUKUS from achieving its envisioned role as a robust counterforce to China's ascendancy.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. RISE OF CHINA

China faced a long and deadly civil war lasting over two decades from 1927 to 1949, fought between the communist and nationalist factions and it was engaged in a war with Japan during the 1930s. The communists won in October 1949, but the nation was severely devastated by the prolonged conflict (History Champs, n.d.). China after communist victory became isolated nation due to limited international recognition. The process of slow recovery began by introducing various policies like five-year plans, collectivisation. Instead of recovery it did opposite. Its economy suffered due to state policies of great leap and Cultural Revolution. China got slowly recognised by world nations in 1970s. With it, China began to open itself and bring reforms after Mao's death. Through an open-door policy the Chinese government began to pursue an open-door policy, in which it

adopted a stance to achieve economic growth through the active introduction of foreign capital and technology while maintaining its commitment to socialism (Kobayashi, Baobo and Sano, 1999). The aim of this policy shift was to rebuild its economy and society that were devastated by the Cultural Revolution. The shift in policy seems to have been driven by the acknowledgment that the average income of ordinary Chinese people was significantly lower when compared to incomes in other Asian economies. This recognition made the realization that the Chinese state and the survival of the communist regime were at risk unless substantive measures were taken to enhance the living standards of its people through sustained economic growth.

1.2. CHINESE ECONOMIC RISE

The Chinese economy has experienced rapid acceleration in growth since the implementation of reforms and complemented by its inclusion (World Trade Organization, 2012) in World trade organization (WTO). Large-scale capital investments funded foreign investments, along with rapid gains in productivity, have emerged as pivotal factors contributing to China's remarkable economic expansion. The introduction of economic reforms has notably improved overall efficiency, resulting in increased output and providing additional resources for further investments in the economy.

MILITARY MODERNIZATION

The Chinese government is not only engaged in economic reforms but military too actively. It's engaged in increasing its military capabilities, striving to enhance strength, efficiency, and technological prowess to position China's military, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), among the world's foremost forces. This ambitious initiative reflects a historic surge in defence spending. The overarching goal is to transform the PLA into a preeminent maritime power capable of exerting dominance across the Asia-Pacific region, encompassing strategic areas like Taiwan and the South China Sea. Faced with the technological sophistication of U.S. forces, Chinese leaders acknowledged the imperative of modernizing their military

capabilities to deter intervention by foreign powers in the region. To bridge this gap, the government has exponentially increased defence spending, directed investments toward cutting-edge weaponry for advanced anti-access area denial (A2/AD), and initiated programs aimed at propelling the Chinese defence industry to the forefront of global competitiveness (Maizland, 2020).

1.3. CHINESE EXPANSION: A THREAT TO US AMBITIONS

United States emerged as the sole superpower after the end of the Cold War, but its focus shifted towards maintaining the status quo through wars since then, which resulted in diverting attention from the rise of a formidable power—China. In 2001, China, following its induction into the World Trade Organization, embarked on a rapid transformation, unveiling economic initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to increase global dependency and cultivate a robust soft image.

The Belt and Road Initiative is a mega infrastructure project. It has been instrumental in expanding China's economic and infrastructural influence across Asia, Africa, and Europe, offering alternative economic options to countries in the global south beyond traditional European and American routes. This strategic maneuvering poses a considerable and intricate challenge to U.S. ambitions on the global stage (Lindley, 2022).

China's transformation into the world's second-largest economy has transcended economic boundaries, encompassing a multifaceted expansion that includes geopolitical influence, military capabilities, technological advancements, and economic dominance. Geopolitically, China's assertive approach in global affairs has gained attention from U.S. policymakers. The BRI, for instance, has not only boosted China's geopolitical standing but has also challenged the traditional spheres of influence that the United States has sought to maintain (Lew, Roughead, Hillman, & Sacks, 2021).

U.S. strategic interests, such as safeguarding the freedom of navigation in the region is being challenged in parallel due to China's

ongoing military modernization, as its navy, poses a direct challenge. This challenge is important for making sure the movement of vessels is vital for global trade and economic interests, given the sea's abundance of natural resources. The military buildup, coupled with territorial assertiveness, notably in the South China Sea, has the potential to reshape power dynamics in critical regions, posing a threat to U.S. military dominance.

Furthermore, China's technological prowess challenges traditional norms. Emerging as a global leader in areas such as 5G technology and artificial intelligence, China's technological advancements fuel not only its economic growth but also raise concerns about potential strategic advantages, particularly in cyber warfare and information dominance.

Economically, China's ascent as an economic powerhouse disrupts established norms, with its state-led economic model, mercantilist policies, and industrial subsidies causing concerns about unfair trade practices, intellectual property theft, and the erosion of U.S. economic competitiveness. In this complex landscape, the United States must grapple with the multifaceted challenges posed by China's expansion and strategically position itself to navigate the evolving global order (Goswami, 2023).

1.4. US COUNTER STRATEGY: BANDWAGONING

Since the Second World War, the United States has strategically formed alliances as a means of keeping checks on its rivals. Starting with NATO and other alliances during the Cold War against USSR, evolving to alliances formed during the global war on terror in the post-Cold War era, and currently establishing alliances to counter China, the U.S. has consistently pursued this approach to maintain its hegemony and strengthen its strategic position. A notable current example is the AUKUS alliance, composed of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, which has become a central element along with QUAD in the U.S. counterstrategy against China's expanding influence in the Indo-Pacific region. This alliance highlights the U.S. emphasis on alliances as a cornerstone of its strategy to

navigate and manage China's ascendancy. AUKUS, with its focus on defense collaboration and technological advancements, serves as a prime illustration of how the United States strategically leverages alliances to fortify its position in the ever-evolving geopolitical landscape.

1.4.1. AUSTRALIA UNITED KINGDOM UNITED STATES (AUKUS) ALLIANCE

AUKUS is a trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, with objectives that span defense, technology, and the development of nuclear-powered submarines. It was formed in 2021, The alliance is strategically geared towards bolstering Australia's maritime capabilities, marking a significant shift in the country's defense strategy and a heightened commitment to regional security and deterrence. A primary goal of AUKUS is to counter China's expanding influence (BBC News, 2021) in the Indo-Pacific region. This objective is pursued through a unified effort to shape the regional balance of power, leveraging strengthened alliances and capabilities to uphold order in accordance with established rules.

AUKUS reflects a shared interest among its members in preserving regional stability, fostering technological innovation, and cultivating stronger defense relations (U.S. Department of Defense, 2024). The trilateral collaboration involves elevating collective defense capabilities through the development and sharing of advanced technologies, particularly in the realm of nuclear-powered submarines. AUKUS also places a significant emphasis on contributing to deterrence and regional stability by enhancing military capabilities among its member nations. The strategic acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines is positioned to reinforce the alliance's maritime strength. Beyond conventional military realms, AUKUS extends its collaboration to Security and Intelligence Sharing, emphasizing a comprehensive strategy to address shared security concerns in the dynamic Indo-Pacific region (Ankara Sosyal Bilimler Üniversitesi, 2023).

1.5. CHINESE ASSERTIVENESS IN CONTRAST TO US FREE AND OPEN INDO PACIFIC STRATEGY

Since its accession to the World Trade Organization, China has increasingly asserted its influence in the Pacific region through economic means. It lays claim to a significant portion of the region under the controversial and historic Nine-Dash Line concept (The Diplomat, 2016). This line encompasses areas beyond what's allowed under UN Law (International Maritime Organization, n.d.). In response to any naval activities undertaken by neighboring countries, China deems them provocative, especially instances involving the deployment of ships (Al Arabiya, 2024). This approach stands in stark contrast to the U.S. policy of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), which envisions a free, open, connected, prosperous, resilient, and secure region, where countries are empowered to adapt to the challenges and opportunities (U.S. Agency for International Development, n.d.). The FOIP strategy extends from Japan in the east to India in the west, with the goal of safeguarding against perceived threats posed by a growing China to the rules-based international order, universal liberal values, and unimpeded access to the global maritime commons.

"Free and Open Indo-Pacific" strategy, rejected by China, labeled as nothing more than "sea foam in the Pacific or Indian Ocean", perspective characterizes this strategy as a manifestation of hegemonic designs and a Cold War mentality (Wuthnow, 2020). According to China, while the strategy may capture initial attention, it is anticipated to eventually fade away. This divergence in perspectives on regional strategies underscores the complex dynamics at play, with China leveraging its economic prowess and territorial claims against the U.S.-led vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific. This clash of ideologies and geopolitical interests poses challenges for initiatives like AUKUS, as the alliance endeavors to counterbalance China's influence and secure regional stability (Swaine, 2018).

1.6. PROMOTING GEO ECONOMIC COOPERATION: ADVANCING STABILITY IN ASIA

In the current era of geo-economics, military alliances are not the need of hour. Countries are looking for economic potential and will build alliances where their economic needs are met. By adopting confrontational posture toward China, the US risks creating a pointless Cold War with Beijing as it seeks to form military alliances. The potential conflict is cantered on Asia, with the South China Sea emerging as a critical hotspot. The region, known for its stability and growth, cannot afford another war that would disrupt its progress. The countries often referred to as Asian tigers are situated in this area. Instead, Asia needs instead is a far more constructive regional approach grounded in a stable balance of power and in mutual compromise rather than confrontation.

1.6.1. ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS (ASEAN)

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations also commonly known as ASEAN is a regional intergovernmental organization comprising ten countries in Southeast Asia. Established on August 8, 1967, its member states include Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia. The primary objectives of ASEAN are to promote regional stability, economic growth, social progress, and cultural development. It operates on the principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states and consensus-based decision-making. ASEAN plays a crucial role in fostering cooperation, dialogue, and conflict resolution within the region (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, n.d.)

The fundamental tenet of ASEAN centrality is rooted in fostering cooperation, dialogue, and conflict resolution among its member states and external partners. This is achieved by positioning the ASEAN as a pivotal driver and coordinating entity in regional affairs. It was created in backdrop of wars in region and to prevent such disasters from happening again. However, the emergence of AUKUS raises concerns as it appears to undermine this principle, potentially diminishing ASEAN's role in shaping the regional security landscape.

AUKUS, by emphasizing advanced military capabilities, poses a challenge to the existing balance of power and strategic calculations in

the Indo-Pacific region. This shift may escalate tensions and security issues, especially given the potential for an arms race triggered by the alliance's focus on cutting-edge military technologies.

The significance of ASEAN as a mediator and facilitator of conflict resolution could be undermined by AUKUS. The alliance's emphasis on military prowess may overshadow ASEAN's role, putting its mediation mechanisms at risk and hindering its ability to address regional conflicts effectively (Ankara Sosyal Bilimler Üniversitesi, 2023).

One of ASEAN's primary concerns regarding AUKUS is the risk of nuclear proliferation which is yet to be addressed by alliance resulting from the provision of nuclear technology. While ASEAN has not yet reached a unified stance on AUKUS, a general opposition to nuclear proliferation is evident. However, the Association is divided on this issue, with approximately half of its members maintaining a cautious silence, revealing internal differences and challenges in reaching a consensus (Li, 2022).

The lack of a unified response from ASEAN on AUKUS highlights the difficulty of reconciling the diverse national interests within the bloc. However, the collective concern about nuclear proliferation demonstrates ASEAN's shared opposition regarding the potential consequences of the pact. Moving forward, resolving these internal divisions will be essential for ASEAN to effectively address the challenges posed by AUKUS and maintain its central role in regional diplomacy and security (National Library of Medicine, 2022)

1.7. HISTORICAL INSTANCES OF INEFFECTIVE CONTAINMENT STRATEGIES AGAINST ASCENDING POWER

Throughout history, there is enough evidence to suggest that when a dominant power is in decline and a new power emerges, the established power often resorts to direct or indirect warfare to counter the rising power and preserve the existing order. This historical pattern underscores the intricate dynamics of international relations, where power shifts can give rise to geopolitical tensions and, in certain instances, escalate into armed conflicts. The

weakening power interprets the emerging power as a menace, leading to military actions aimed at preserving the existing status quo.

This phenomenon aligns with the principles of the Power Transition Theory (Oxford Bibliographies, 2017), which posits that major conflicts are more likely during periods of power transition. As the declining power sees its influence wane and a new power emerges, the risk of conflict increases. This dynamic is commonly referred to as the "Thucydides' Trap," drawing from Thucydides' analysis of the Peloponnesian War, where fear, honor, and interest were identified as key catalysts for conflict.

Containment is often employed to manage rising powers peacefully; its success is not guaranteed. Containment can be hindered by regional challenges, the rise of nationalism, and conflicting strategic interests. In some cases, economic sanctions and military posturing aimed at containment may escalate tensions, ultimately leading to full-scale war.

1.7.1. THE CASE OF NAZI GERMANY IN EUROPE

The aftermath of World War I witnessed the emergence of dictatorships and fascist leaders across Europe, driven by a loss of public trust in their governments' ability to address post-war economic challenges. This disillusionment paved the way for populist leaders who, employing aggressive and authoritarian methods, sought to achieve their objectives. These leaders often dismantled parliamentary checks and balances, taking advantage of the absence of international enforcement mechanisms by the League of Nations (Lumen Learning, n.d.).

Adolf Hitler, the leader of Germany, used this trend, pursuing expansionist goals through negotiations with European nations. In the 1930s, as Nazi Germany aggressively expanded its territories and militarized under Hitler's leadership, Britain and France opted for a policy of appeasement (Drishti IAS, 2022). This diplomatic strategy aimed to meet Hitler's demands in the hope of averting a recurrence of the devastating World War I. The fundamental premise was to avoid confrontation, striving to maintain peace by acceding to the aggressor's demands.

However, the policy of appeasement during this period in history had consequences. The lessons drawn from this episode highlight the inherent risks of appeasement as a diplomatic tool. Rather than deterring Nazi Germany, fueled by appeasement, Hitler's convictions strengthened, ultimately leading to the escalation of his expansionist ambitions and the subsequent outbreak of World War II.

The crucial lesson learned from the appeasement of Nazi Germany is that accommodating aggressive powers without imposing meaningful consequences can lead to greater conflicts. In this case, the failure to address rising threats early and with a firm stance allowed Hitler to push the boundaries further, ultimately triggering World War II.

This historical example highlights the importance of a decisive approach in the face of emerging threats. It serves as a stark reminder that appeasement, while seemingly a path to avoid immediate conflict, can inadvertently pave the way for more significant and destructive confrontations. Policymakers and leaders must be vigilant, recognizing the need to confront rising threats decisively rather than hoping that appeasement will ensure long-term stability. The lessons from the appeasement of Nazi Germany continue to shape contemporary foreign policy discussions and the understanding of the delicate balance between diplomacy, deterrence, and the prevention of aggression.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology of this paper uses a multidimensional approach to deliver a thorough analysis. It begins with **qualitative analysis**, which reviews historical precedents, such as the appeasement of Nazi Germany, to draw parallels and derive insights relevant to China's current rise. **Case study** is used to investigate specific instances of AUKUS's strategies, evaluating their effectiveness and identifying the challenges and limitations faced by the alliance in countering China. The paper also incorporates **comparative analysis** to assess the AUKUS approach against alternative strategies, such as economic diplomacy and regional integration, evaluating their potential effectiveness in managing China's influence. Lastly, **secondary sources** are utilized to gain insights from policy experts, regional analysts,

and academic literature, providing a well-rounded understanding of the limitations of current strategies and exploring potential alternatives for addressing China's ascendancy.

3. ANALYSIS

The confrontation between the AUKUS alliance and China presents a landscape of competition, where each side shows different strengths and weaknesses that influence regional dynamics. Through the sharing of nuclear submarine capabilities among its members, AUKUS leverages advanced military technologies and strategic alliances. This cooperative effort aims to maintain a technological edge over China. However, AUKUS's long-term sustainability is challenged by its reliance on specific logistical hubs, geographical dispersion, and internal political dynamics, including economic strain and public opposition to military expenditure. On the opposite hand, China uses its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a significant tool for economic potential, offering inclusive technology-sharing approaches that contrast with AUKUS's selective strategies. By integrating developing nations into its economic framework through trade, infrastructure investment, and financial institutions, China enhances its influence, particularly in the Global South. Additionally, China's centralized governance and strategic economic planning afford it the ability to pursue long-term goals with greater efficiency compared to the political and economic pressures faced by democracies. Despite these advantages, China's authoritarian governance model, presents obstacles in gaining the trust of potential allies. Its alliances with countries such as North Korea and Russia are often pragmatic rather than ideological, limiting the formation of a broader coalition against AUKUS.

The internal factors within the US, Australia, and the UK significantly impact their collective response to China's rise. Domestic political stability, public opinion, and economic interests shape the decision-making processes that define AUKUS's strategies. As these countries navigate their individual challenges, the effectiveness of AUKUS in countering China's ambitions will largely depend on their ability to address these internal dynamics.

4. CHINESE RESPONSE

4.1. PACT WITH SOLOMON ISLAND

In 2022, a leaked pact revealed plans for the Solomon Islands and China to sign an agreement regarding the deployment of troops, aimed at enhancing cooperation in law enforcement and security matters (Associated Press, 2023). This development highlights the Solomon Islands' significance as a major success in China's broader strategy to extend its influence across the South Pacific.

Of particular concern to the United States and its allies is the proximity of the proposed troop deployment to Australia and New Zealand. This strategic move by China has raised eyebrows, prompting heightened vigilance from regional powers given the potential impacts for security dynamics in the South Pacific.

The historical context of the South Pacific further accentuates the significance of this pact. Once regarded as part of an "American lake," the region has been a focal point of commercial and security interests dating back to as early as 1825. The evolving geopolitical landscape in the South Pacific demands a nuanced understanding of historical ties and contemporary power shifts as nations navigate the complexities of regional influence and security dynamics (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022)

4.2. ECONOMIC RELIEF

China's reaction to the AUKUS alliance in the Indo-Pacific introduces a new dimension to the dynamics of the region. Following the consolidation of a security alliance by Australia, the UK, and the US, impacting regional stability, China is strategically leveraging economic aid. The country has already declared its intentions to extend trade deals with nations, solidifying its position as the top trading partner in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) group (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2024).

Employing economic aid as a geopolitical and geo strategic tool, China aims to strengthen diplomatic ties in the Indo-Pacific. Through financial assistance, China seeks to establish an alternative economic sphere, countering the influence wielded by AUKUS nations. Notably, this influence has forced several countries to

shift their recognition from Taiwan to China (Bock, 2024).

China is considering the expansion of trade and economic partnerships with nations affected by AUKUS, offering favorable agreements to position it as a dependable economic partner. This strategic move is designed to divert attention from the security-centric focus of AUKUS.

Furthermore, economic aid, functioning as a form of soft power, enables China to project a positive image and shape perceptions in the region. By addressing economic needs and development aspirations, China builds stronger diplomatic relationships, countering potential negativity stemming from AUKUS initiatives.

Strategically, economic aid from China seeks to mitigate potential negative impacts of AUKUS on regional economies. By providing financial support to affected countries, China positions itself as a stabilizing force, alleviating economic concerns and fostering a more receptive attitude toward Chinese influence. (U.S. Institute of Peace, 2022)

Ultimately, China's approach interlinks economic and diplomatic strategies to navigate and shape the evolving geopolitical landscape in the Indo-Pacific, showcasing its multifaceted response to the challenges posed by the AUKUS alliance.

5. CHINESE WEAKNESS: STRENGTH OF AUKUS

5.1. ALLIANCES

AUKUS represents a significant military collaboration aimed at countering China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region. This trilateral partnership is designed to enhance regional security through the sharing of advanced technologies and the development of sophisticated capabilities, such as nuclear-powered submarines. By combining their resources and expertise, AUKUS members create a powerful deterrent against China's assertive actions.

One more thing to be mentioned in terms of alliances is that the AUKUS members have a network of other allies and partners beyond this alliance, further amplifying their strategic capabilities. In contrast, China has only one formal ally, North Korea (Buchanan, 2024), limiting its ability to coordinate a multilateral

response to regional challenges and a strategic partner in form of Russia.

The AUKUS alliance's collaborative approach ensures a coordinated response to any regional threats posed by China, leveraging the collective strength of its members and their broader network of allies. This strategic partnership demonstrates a united commitment to maintaining regional stability and security in the face of China's expanding influence.

6. CHINESE STRENGTH: WEAKNESSES OF AUKUS

6.1. ECONOMIC LEVERAGE

Many countries in the global South are underdeveloped (Hampton Think, 2024), often due to a legacy of prolonged internal conflicts, regional hostilities, or involvement in global conflicts since the post-World War II era. The conclusion of the Cold War ushered in a period of relative peace for many, but the emergence of the United States as a hegemonic power influenced these nations to align with its ideological framework.

In the 21st century, as the United States became embroiled in conflicts and the global South found limited options for economic recovery, the opportunity to rebuild effectively was scarce. During this time, China underwent a dramatic ascent facilitated by economic reforms and its induction into the World Trade Organization (WTO). China began challenging the order led by the U.S. and, recognizing the challenges faced by the global South, offered viable alternatives for these nations to pursue economic development.

One significant flaw in the U.S.-led order was its reliance on the military-industrial complex (Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics). Military aid can't help in the development of an economy. China has pursued a strategy of economic leverage through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to bolster the economies and infrastructure of participating nations which gave alternative options (McBride, Berman, & Chatzky, 2023). The BRI, launched in 2013, is a vast and ambitious infrastructure development and investment project that spans multiple continents. It aims to enhance connectivity, trade, and economic cooperation by building roads, railways, ports, and other infrastructure. It began building

alternative order in form of financial institutions in form of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and New Development Bank (NDB) (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, 2017)

6.2. TECHNOLOGICAL PROWESS

China's rapid development has become a noteworthy and frequently discussed phenomenon, particularly in the realm of technological progress. This prowess is a testament to the nation's strategic initiatives and investments in research and development. Despite entering the global competition later than some, China has swiftly caught up with and, in certain areas, even surpassed the U.S. and other nations. This rapid advancement underscores China's focused and dynamic approach to economic and industrial growth. (Brookings Institution, 2020)

AUKUS exhibits a tendency to restrict technology sharing, primarily driven by strategic and security considerations. This alliance places a strong emphasis on safeguarding advanced military technologies, and as a result, it often adopts a cautious and selective approach when it comes to sharing critical technological insights and advancements. China stands apart from AUKUS nations by adopting a distinct approach to technology sharing. Unlike the restrictive stance of AUKUS, China actively engages in unprecedented access and collaboration with foreign companies, promoting a global exchange of knowledge. This open strategy contributes to global technological advancement and underscores the evolving dynamics in international cooperation and technology sharing. (Reuters, 2023)

7. LOGISTICAL CONTRAST: CHINA'S BRI VS AUKUS CHALLENGES IN REGIONAL PRESENCE

China's formidable presence in the region is strengthened by its capability for swift troop deployment, a strategic advantage facilitated by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Leveraging the BRI, China has adeptly established alternative supply routes, circumvented conventional hubs and secured crucial access to ports for troop deployment across various Asian regions. This strategic move enhances China's

flexibility in responding to geopolitical developments.

In contrast, the AUKUS alliance, composed of Australia, the UK, and the US, faces inherent logistical challenges due to its geographical spread across different continents. This geographical dispersion introduces complexities in terms of military coordination, deployment, and logistical support. Unlike China, AUKUS lacks readily available alternative trade routes, relying more on specific strategic points and chokepoints for deployment and logistical support (Lindley, 2022).

The alliance's dependence on specific points of entry becomes a potential vulnerability, particularly in scenarios involving disruptions or heightened geopolitical tensions at these key locations. This contrast in logistical capabilities underscores the challenges AUKUS may encounter in maintaining the agility and rapid response demonstrated by China through its strategically established BRI alternative routes.

8. CHALLENGES WITHIN AUKUS AND CHINA'S STRATEGIC EDGE IN DOMESTIC DYNAMICS

Each member of AUKUS is grappling with domestic challenges, including the economic fallout from COVID-19. The imperative to rebuild their economies takes precedence, particularly with democracies in places where public sentiment does not favor war. High inflation and unemployment further compel these nations to prioritize domestic needs over military endeavors.

Given the economic strain of maintaining a robust military, including investments in advanced technologies like nuclear submarines, there is a reluctance to divert resources from pressing domestic issues (Mölling, Hellmonds, & Winter, 2023). Balancing defense budgets with other priorities becomes a formidable challenge in such circumstances, as people exhibit minimal interest in military affairs. The United States encounters challenges in Congress concerning budgetary matters, with obstacles arising from a deadlock. The leadership's primary focus on international affairs creates a divergence from domestic priorities, leading to tensions within the parliament and among the public.

AUKUS faces additional hurdles related to elections, as leadership changes loom as a potential outcome. Public opinion and political challenges within member countries wield significant influence over the alliance's continuity and effectiveness. Shifts in leadership or changes in public opinion have the potential to impact the commitment to AUKUS and its overarching objectives. The alliance must navigate these domestic intricacies to maintain cohesion and achieve its strategic goals.

China being a communist state has no worry of popular opinion as they don't conduct elections like others. Their economy is strong and compatibly stable to AUKUS. The centralized planning and control over economic policies enable the Chinese government to implement long-term strategies without the immediate pressures. This stability in economic planning and execution provides China with a degree of resilience that contrasts with the economic challenges faced by AUKUS members, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

9. DISCUSSION

Analysing the current containment strategies, including those implemented by AUKUS and various US policies, reveals both their advantages and limitations in addressing China's growing influence. While AUKUS strategies have introduced advanced military capabilities and strengthened regional alliances, they may not fully capture the complexity of China's rise. Adjustments to these strategies may be necessary to better manage China's economic and technological progress.

Internal challenges within AUKUS countries significantly affect their collective strategy against China. Political instability, economic difficulties, and other domestic issues can weaken the ability of these nations to present a unified front. Political discord and economic pressures may compromise their strategic unity and effectiveness in responding to China's expanding assertiveness.

To effectively counterbalance China's influence, enhancing multilateral cooperation is essential. Strengthening alliances with regional powers and boosting economic integration with ASEAN can create a more robust response to China's expansion. A coordinated effort involving key regional players can improve collective security

and economic stability, helping to mitigate China's regional dominance.

Technological advancements play a crucial role in maintaining stability in the region. By investing in cutting-edge technologies, AUKUS and other alliances can address China's growing capabilities and sustain a strategic advantage. Advanced military and cybersecurity technologies are vital for defending against China's technological advancements and ensuring stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1. HOW TO COUNTER CHINESE INFLUENCE?

The effectiveness of containment strategies appears doubtful, demanding a shift towards engaging all stakeholders more effectively. However, domestic challenges within AUKUS members, such as the U.S. Congress's rejection of President Biden's Build Back Better plan (Komaiszko, 2022), hinder international engagement efforts. The plan, designed to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), faces opposition domestically, with Congress urging a focus on domestic priorities. Similar issues plague the UK, grappling with a migrant crisis, inflation, and economic concerns (The Week, 2023). Australia, too, contends with domestic challenges like climate issues. Failure to address these internal matters risks diminishing governments' capabilities to wield global influence and invites opposition scrutiny. The allies of US are disillusioned over its reliability and France openly considers crafting policies independent of American influence (Politico, 2023). The strategy employed by the United States was to compel Australia to abandon its submarine agreement with France. The persistence of domestic issues not only weakens global influence but also creates opportunities for China to expand its sway. A clear example is China's recent efforts to foster rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia in the Middle East and breakthroughs in establishing trade relations in Latin America, regions that were once strongholds of the USA. With China's influence on the rise, containment strategies appear increasingly unlikely to succeed.

Also, investment in advanced military and cybersecurity technologies is essential for

countering China's growing technological strength. Without any progress, AUKUS members risk falling behind as China continues its rapid military modernization. Failure to address both internal and external challenges enables China to expand its global influence, as demonstrated by its successful mediation between Iran and Saudi Arabia and its growing trade relationships in Latin America, a region once dominated by U.S. influence for over a century. As China's reach extends, traditional containment strategies appear increasingly ineffective. A more collaborative, technology-focused approach is required to maintain stability and balance in global power dynamics.

10.2. WHAT FUTURE HOLDS?

In this era, a military alliance like AUKUS may face challenges in achieving success. China has strategically formed economic alliances in the region, bolstering its image through collaboration. ASEAN, a key player, advocates for integration and a policy of non-interference, while the U.S. has a historical record of interference dating back to the Cold War. Given the diversity of cultures across regions, policymakers should consider a shift in strategy, recognizing that a one-size-fits-all approach may not be universally effective. Tailoring plans according to the cultural nuances of each region becomes imperative. Consequently, the U.S. may find greater success by pivoting towards economic-based policies in the region. Otherwise risk war.

11. CONCLUSION

The AUKUS alliance foundation is hailed as a crucial response to the challenges posed by China's expanding influence in the Indo-Pacific. Despite its initial promise, AUKUS faces tough challenges rooted in domestic issues within its member countries, such as the U.S. Congress's rejection of President Biden's plan, the UK's concerns with a migrant crisis and inflation, and Australia's climate issues. Failure to address these internal matters weakens global influence and provides opportunities for China to expand its sway.

China's rise, defined by economic reforms and membership in the World Trade Organization, has reshaped global power dynamics, challenging U.S. interests through initiatives like

the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and military modernization. AUKUS, formed in 2021, focuses on defense collaboration and technological advancements, but its military based approach faces challenges, especially considering China's economic strategies in the region. The Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy of U.S., contrasts with China's BRI, raising concerns about regional dynamics and the role of ASEAN in shaping regional security. China responds to AUKUS with strategic economic aid, trade deals, and diplomatic initiatives to counterbalance its security-oriented focus. China's economic leverage, technological prowess, and military presence pose challenges to AUKUS, compounded by domestic hurdles, leadership changes, and public sentiment issues within the alliance. Historical examples, such as the appeasement of Nazi Germany, underscore the risks of accommodating rising powers without consequences, leading to the suggestion that containment strategies may not be effective. The paper emphasizes the need for engagement with stakeholders but recognizes internal challenges within AUKUS members and their reluctance to prioritize international engagement.

Looking forward, a shift from military-centric alliances to economic-based policies is a need to recognize the diverse cultural nuances of each region. The one-size-fits-all approach may not be universally effective, and tailoring strategies according to cultural contexts is deemed imperative for success in countering China's influence in the Indo-Pacific.

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